

The God Who Was Not

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[0 : 00] Hello everyone. Are you doing alright? It's a bit warm. It's fine though, right? No problems, no problems at all. My name is Aaron. I'm the pastor of the service. If you're brand new, come and say hi afterwards. I'd really love to meet you.

We are starting this week a short series in Kings. We're looking at a section of Kings. In particular, we're going to spend five weeks looking at Elijah, the story of Elijah, who was an Old Testament prophet.

And since we're sort of jumping right smack in the middle of 1-2 Kings, some overview of the whole story is probably going to be helpful, I think.

So, let's do that. Let me tell you the basic story of 1-2 Kings. So, 1-2 Kings is one story. It's a unified story. And it carries on from 1-2 Samuel.

So, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, which is immediately before it in the Bible. Now, by the time 2 Samuel has finished and 1-1 Kings starts, at that point, David, King David, as he is now, King David has unified all these tribes into a kingdom.

[1 : 11] But by the time 1 Kings starts, he's done that, but he's quite old at this point. So, the rest of 1-2 Kings, at its simplest level, is about the kings who followed on from David.

Now, a bit more. So, way, way back in the days, God promised Abraham that a Messiah would come from this line of kings who would rule all the nations. And in 1-2 Kings, it talks about this long line of kings.

But, they're actually mostly pretty terrible. And they don't fulfill the promise given to Abraham. It's so bad, in fact, that at the ends of 2 Kings, the kingdom sort of falls apart.

So, you got that? Okay. Let's go. Let's go. That's 40,000 feet. Let's drop it down one more level, a bit more detail. Detail is really important here. All right. 1-2 Kings.

1-2 Kings. There are five big movements. And you need this to understand the story of Elijah. There are five big movements. The first movement. David, in his last days, he consolidates his power.

[2 : 27] And, I mean, he does kill a few people to do that, which is pretty bad, actually. But, he passes on his kingdom to his son, Solomon.

So, that's the first kind of movement. Second movement. So, King Solomon's running the show now. He's, you know, the wise King Solomon. He's a great statesman.

He builds this amazing temple. So, that's all positive. But, things go sideways when he starts marrying a whole lot of the daughters of all these foreign kings.

As an aside here, people sort of, you know, sort of trash the Bible sometimes by saying, how can you guys talk about traditional marriage? What marriage are you talking about in the Bible?

There's lots of polygamy, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Every time polygamy is mentioned, it's really bad. So, the Bible doesn't say polygamy is a fantastic thing. It actually says it's a really bad thing.

[3 : 23] So, anyway, Solomon, he marries all these daughters. Why does he do that? Because they're political marriages. He's trying to build sort of alliances with all these other kingdoms around him.

So, he has all these wives who are from pagan countries, and they import their foreign gods with them. So, that's bad. That's a bad thing. Solomon also starts to get involved in slave labor.

And in the end of his reign, he actually looks more like Pharaoh than a godly king. So, that's the second movement. David, Solomon, great start, bad end.

Third movement. Because of all the stuff that Solomon had done, the kingdom basically breaks in half. It snaps in half Judah and Israel.

So, this is a big deal. Fourth movement. After the big split, this is towards the end of one kings. The next big chunk of the story is basically just going through all the kings that ruled the northern and the southern kingdom.

[4 : 26] And we hear all these stories. And again, the Bible sort of gives like a report card for these kings. Again, mostly really bad. There's a couple of good ones, but they're mostly really bad.

And one of the ways that God deals with these really corrupt kings is he sends prophets to speak to what's going on. Now, prophets in the Bible.

No, prophets, if you're new to the Christian thing or not a Christian. The idea of prophets, that sounds kind of spooky, voodoo-y stuff. It's not. It's not prophets in the Bible are not fortune tellers. They are like watchdogs for the covenant.

I'll get to that in a moment. See, the kings were supposed to be, the kings who were running these kingdoms are supposed to be under God. And when they're not under God, when they're just doing whatever they want, God would come in and place his word over them.

They're supposed to be under God. And when they're not, God would send his prophets in and put his word over them. And he would speak to the kings who strayed from the covenant.

[5 : 29] Remember, this covenant was this promise that God had made. He said a Messiah would come from this line of kings and the kingdom would be eternal. And God was going to make this happen. It's unconditional.

It's a covenant. You can't break that. It's like it's a done deal. But there was contingency in that. What if the king turned out to be super sketchy? What would happen?

There would be curses. There would be problems. What if the king was really good? There would be blessings. So the prophets come in and speak those things. So that's their job, to remind the kings of God's expectations of what a godly kingdom or godly king looks like.

And to let them know that curses will come if they're really sketchy, like they bring in pagan gods, etc. Now of all of the prophets, the two big ones in kings are Elijah and Elisha.

Elijah and Elisha. And Elijah, who we're going to talk about, is just awesome. We're going to learn all about them over the next month. Elijah's nemesis was King Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

[6 : 33] And they are just a terrible combo. One of the reasons they're such a terrible combo is because they actively promoted the worship of this god called Baal.

And they were involved in child sacrifices, etc. So terrible, terrible business. Jezebel, for example, she was an active evangelist for Baal, this Baal worship.

And so she imported like hundreds and hundreds of Baal priests from her hometown and put them on the government payroll. And Elijah would keep calling them out.

What are you doing? What are you doing? Here's what's going to happen if you keep doing this, etc. And in the end, now we're at the final movement. So we have David, United of the Kingdom, Old, passes it on to Solomon.

Does pretty good. Does really bad. Kingdom splits. Then we have a whole lot of different kings. Prophets speaking to the whole lot of different kings. And the last movement, the fifth movement, as a result of all this corruption, God punishes them.

[7 : 38] And the Babylonians from the north just sweep in and take over both kingdoms. And that's the period called exile. All right?

That's it, man. That's it. That's it. That's how two kings ends. So, did you get that? One more time in 20 seconds. Actually, no, you've got it. Let's get into it. Let's get into it. One and two kings.

Let's get to the text. One king 17. And this is where we first meet this wild man, Elijah. And I do not have, for those of you who are real, who like three-point sermons, I don't have one tonight.

I'm basically going to make just observations. We're going to go through the story. I'm going to make some observations. And that's us. Verse 1. The first mention of Elijah.

And it's Elijah confronting Ahab, King Ahab. And we know nothing about Elijah. Elijah. He just appears. All we know is where he came from.

[8 : 35] Was he married? Did he have a profession? Nothing about his kids. His older daughter. She's a dental hygienist. The younger son. He's still trying to find himself.

We literally just know nothing about them, right? It's just Elijah. He's from this place. He's just there. And his first mention is nose to nose with the most corrupt king God's people have ever had.

And God has a message for the king through Elijah. And the message is this. As the Lord lives, it's not going to rain until I say. As the Lord lives, it's not going to rain until I say.

There's a lot in there. Elijah makes a point of describing the Lord as the one who lives. You can sort of slide over that, couldn't you?

But we don't slide over that. What's he saying there? The inference is this Baal character that has corrupted God's people that we're all trying to get on board with is a fiction. Elijah is saying here, I serve the God.

[9 : 39] You, Ahab, serve a pretense. And he goes on to say, here's the punishment for what you're doing. And the punishment is a drought, which is a terrible, terrible thing.

But it's not just a random thing. It's not like God's just so angry. It's like, okay, what am I going to do? You know, like, locusts. What am I going to do here? Oh, maybe a drought.

That'll really, that'll be, no. There's a point in the drought. It's not a left field punishment. A drought is an attack on Baalism at its theological center.

Because Baal, one of Baal's names was, could anybody guess, the Lord of rain. Rain was his specialty.

This was like his, you know, major. This was like his thing. And the Lord is saying, I'm shutting off the rain. So you can see people of God.

[10 : 43] So you can see Israel. So you can see Judah. So you can see what a non-God Baal actually is. The Lord is saying, people, you will see that Baal does not come through for you.

Year after year after year after year. He will not come through for you. There will be no rain because there is no Baal. Baal has no control over the weather because he is naught.

But God has control over the weather. He can say a word and he can turn it off and on like a spigot. So Baalism is attacked at its theological center. The first thing that Elijah does.

He confronts Ahab, the worst king that God's people have ever had. And then he disappears. He leaves. He disappears into the wilderness.

Verses 2 to 7. And what do we see here? I mean, it's just a completely bonkers story. It's like it's wonderful but crazy. Before we get there, why does Elijah leave?

[11 : 45] Well, the Lord tells him to leave. Why is that? I mean, it's partly probably like witness protection program. You know, like let's keep him safe.

But there's more going on there. When God confronts Ahab, this is a kindness. This is an act of love.

This is a turn around, Ahab. You're playing games with God. You've got to stop that. It's like when we feel a conviction in our heart about sin. This is love.

This is God saying, stop ruining your life and come back to me. It's a love when God confronts us. When you feel that tug of the Holy Spirit convicting. This is what love looks like.

There are times though in the Bible, it seems, when God stops confronting. When God actually withdraws. And this is a terrible thing.

[12 : 46] Romans 81 and, sorry, Psalm 81 and Romans 1 talk about this. They talk about God just letting people go to do what they want. Ironically, the world says, this is love.

This is what love looks like. Live and let live. No, this is punishment. I'll read you from Psalm 81 here. This is the Lord speaking. But my people did not listen to my voice. Israel would not submit to me.

So they gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own counsels. God steps back and lets people live with the consequences of their decisions.

And this is what's happening in our passage here. God sends Elijah away. It's part of God's punishment on Ahab and the people. God's word is being removed.

And when that happens, it's very significant. And it leads to lots of darkness. So, Elijah leaves. The word of God is removed.

[13 : 46] It's part of God's punishment. And then God provides for Elijah in just this wonderful way. We see he sends him to this brook. And ravens feed him.

Meat and bread, meat and bread. I mean, it just sounds wonderful to me. Meat and bread, meat and bread twice a day. Ravens are an unclean animal as well. When God wants to get something done, he can do it.

He can make that happen. And sometimes he uses just this wild card. I've told you this story before, but it's my best wild card provision story.

So excuse me if you've heard it. But God wanted me to go to Regent College. And how was I going to pay for that? Because I'm an international student, I worked for a non-profit in New Zealand, so I wasn't cashed up.

I couldn't get a student loan because I was an international student. How was I going to pay for that? The Lord was working years and years and years behind the scenes. So I played in this band like 20 years ago.

[14 : 45] I wrote this song. I had no rock and roll dreams. I wrote this song. Another band really liked it. They said, can we record it? They were quite serious about music. They recorded it and they released it.

They released the song as a single. They released the album. The album went number one in New Zealand. And then KFC picked up the song and used it for their jingle, their national jingle for about 18 months in New Zealand.

And I made a lot of money from this. And it all went to Regent College, basically.

KFC paid for my theological education. Beat that story, right? Beat that story. And this is actually true, what I'm saying.

This actually happened. When God wants to make something happen, he can use wild cards. He can do it however he likes to do it.

[15 : 45] God provided for Elijah through birds, unclean, dirty birds. Meat and bread every day, dropping off food for him. And this quiet miracle, I love this quiet day-to-day miracle, right?

God's daily provision. Because it must have been so boring and it must have been brutal being all alone. No idea what's happening in the outside world. Living in obscurity and God is just quietly providing for him.

I love this story, this wilderness story. And I think it helps me as I think about when life feels really obscure sometimes. Like, what am I doing?

What am I doing? What's this patch of my life about? I'm not accomplishing anything, you know. What's God doing in my life? Sometimes I feel like that. Maybe you feel like that sometimes.

This is an encouragement for me to sort of look for the ravens. To look for the places where God is quietly providing for me. I find that very helpful to think about. Okay, let's get on with the story.

[16 : 43] Eventually the brook dries up. The Lord moves Elijah on. And the word of the Lord came to him, Go to Sidon. Again, this is not a random place. The rain wasn't a random punishment.

Sidon's not a random place. What's significant about Sidon? It's the heart of Baal worship. It's where God's people, where Ahab imported it from.

This is the hometown of Jezebel. And God sends Elijah there to seek out a woman. To call her into a relationship with him.

It's fantastic. So God says to Elijah, Okay, go to this place, Sidon. No messing around. Elijah does it. And he says, A widow would provide for you. Which is a bit of an oxymoron.

Because in a drought, Widows would be struggling to provide for themselves. In this sort of cultural moment way back when. But God's going to do something great here.

[17 : 42] He's going to challenge a Baal worshipper In Baal heartland. So what happens? So goes to Sidon. Sees the widow.

Asks the widow for some water. And she brings it. And then he says, Can I have some bread as well? And here we learn about how desperate this situation is for the widow. She's not only having a tough time.

It's like it's all over. Like this is it. It's all over for her. She's gathering some sticks. To build a fire. Because she's got one bit of flour left. She's got one bit of oil left.

She's going to make a dinner for her and her son. There is no social welfare net here. It's just this is it. They're going to eat this meal. Nothing else is coming.

They're going to die. It's just a horrible situation. Elijah says, Do not fear. And then he says, And the audacity of it is incredible. Elijah says to the widow, Go make a meal.

[18 : 36] I'll have the first serving. And you guys can have what's left over. I mean, what a thing to ask this woman. I mean, to ask to share the final meal with her is one thing.

To ask for the first helping of this woman's final meal. All she's got. That's next level confidence right there. But look at what Elijah says in verse 14.

Here's why he can make such an outrageous request. He says in verse 14. For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, The jar of flour shall not be spent. And the jug of oil shall not be empty until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.

So what is this? What's going on here? This is a call to conversion, I believe. She's been asked to trust a promise of God.

Again, she's probably a Baal worshiper. This is her hometown. This is what they do there. But she trusts a sheer promise. She's banking it all on a promise from God. And it's a good thing to do because God keeps his promises.

[19 : 47] We read that the oil doesn't run out and the flour doesn't run out. And it's such, it's like the ravens. It's such a wonderful story. Each day she would go and she would prepare food.

And she would, you know, the contents of the jar would stay the same level. I don't know quite how it worked. But it's not, this is how it didn't work. It didn't work. It wasn't like a, you know, like a van pull up and just dump, you know, 20 huge bags of flour and say, here you go.

You're good for, you're good for the next year. Or a couple of big gallon drums of oil. It wasn't that. It was just the oil wouldn't be spent. The flour wouldn't be spent.

It's every day she would go to her little kitchen nook and there'd be enough for that day. And there's enough for the next day. And there's enough for the next day. I love how this quiet daily drama plays out.

Every day this sort of fresh episode of grace and provision. This quiet miracle. She trusted in this promise. And God provided.

[20 : 54] I'm going to finish up here. God called Elijah into a deeper and increasingly more demanding relationship and trust.

He trusted God in confronting Ahab. He trusted God in isolation in the desert. And during all this time, God is telling Elijah something about himself. That he's a jealous God. He will not put up with other idols.

That he is the God who provides meat and bread from the ravens. And this widow as well. This widow. She's amazing. God calls this widow in Baal's hometown into a relationship of deep trust.

God provides. And the Lord provides for her daily. Oil and flour. And it's this wonderful miracle that foreshadows Christ.

In a number of different ways. Probably in particular. The multiplication of loaves and fishes to feed the thousands. How do we interpret this for us?

[22 : 05] How do we interpret this for us though? God provided for this woman. What does that mean for us? Exactly. It doesn't mean that God will supply all our needs as we feel we have them.

And want them. I'd like to go to Paris for a week. I can't just sort of claim this. I can't write this down on a piece of paper.

And stick it on my vanity at home. And go okay. Well you provided for this woman. You're going to provide for me what I need. We can't do that. But if God wants to get something done.

He will get it done in your life. And we can only claim the promises that God has actually made. So what promises has God made to me in my life?

He has not promised me that I will get to Paris. He has not promised me a really nice new car. He hasn't promised you a spouse. He hasn't promised you an incredible job that will satisfy every aspect of your being.

[23 : 15] What are the things we can claim though? What are the things that God has promised that are of infinite value? He has promised daily forgiveness. He has promised his Holy Spirit his very life in you.

He has promised you that he is the God that wants to change you. That wants to work in your heart. These are...

As I've been thinking about this this week... Because we can get... We can read stuff like this and go yes! Provision! Yes! I'll claim this...

Oh it just... God wants something to happen. It will happen. He'll make it happen using wild card stuff sometimes. But what he has promised you...

Lean into that. God has actually promised... A beautiful relationship with him through Christ. He has promised that when you go to Christ...

[24 : 19] And you say forgive me... Forgive me. You are forgiven. And you do not need to carry that shame... And you do not need to carry that guilt.

You can claim that stuff. Like I'm going to... I'm going to... Finish with just a couple of questions here. Because I could go all night on that. But... Emma's going to come and play for us.

And I want two questions for you to think about. For a couple of minutes while Emma plays. First question is... First starts with a statement. God hates idols. God hates idols.

He will not share the throne of his heart with something else. Because it ruins you. It damages you. It dehumanizes you. It trivializes your life. God will expose those idols.

And get rid of them. That's what he wants to do. So the question is... What are the idols in your heart that you are trusting in? That have been imported into your heart?

[25 : 24] Through relationships with social media. Through relationships with television. Through relationships with unhelpful literature.

What are those idols you've imported into your heart that God hates and wants to get rid of? That's a good question to ask. We should ask that one all the time.

Our hearts are idol-making machines. The second question is this. Where is the Lord asking you to trust him in really big things? Where is the Lord asking you to trust him in small things?

Where in your life, in other words, are you being called into a deeper level of trust with the Lord? So, Emma.

Emma's going to come and play now. Think about those things. Bring them to Jesus. Pray. If you want to ask somebody beside you to pray for you, that's fine as well.

[26 : 24] You can come up later on in the prayer station. The people at the prayer station can pray for you. But just use this time well to do business with God. Idols and trust.

And then I'll come back and we'll pray. God bless you.